Lincoln

LINCOLN'S ELLSWORTH LETTER

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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LINCOLN'S
Ellsworth Letter

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FOREWORD.

ON May 24th, 1861, a month and a half after Sumter surrendered and nearly two months before the first battle of Bull Run, President Lincoln's friend, Colonel Ephraim Elmer Ellsworth was shot in Alexandria, Virginia, by Jackson, the proprietor of the Marshall House, after the impetuous young man had torn down a confederate flag from the top of the building. His body was taken to the White House and lay in state in the East Room. He was the first officer killed in the War of the Rebellion. The President on the following day wrote a letter of sympathy to the sorrowing father and mother.

Ellsworth was a New York boy. At the age of twenty-two he was Adjutant-General of the State of Illinois. In 1859 he studied law in Lincoln's office in Springfield. He organized in Chicago the military company known as Ellsworth's Zouaves, and in 1860 toured the country holding competitive drills with various military organizations. When Lincoln came to Washington Ellsworth accompanied him, and in April in New York he organized and, although but twenty-four, became the Colonel of the 11th

New York Infantry, known as the Fire Zouaves, as the regiment was recruited principally from the Fire Department of New York City.

This beautiful tribute is perhaps the most touching of all the letters written by Lincoln. He was writing of a man whom he knew and loved. The letter does not reach the lofty tone of that to Mrs. Bixby of Boston, or the Gettysburg address, but in the choice of fitting words to stricken parents regarding a son and personal friend, few letters have ever been written that may compare with it.

By the courtesy of Mr. Judd Stewart, in whose notable collection of Lincolniana is the original letter, a fac-simile is shown here.

The photograph of Lincoln is printed directly from a negative, believed to be the original, made by C. S. German, in Springfield, Illinois, early in 1861, just before the President-elect went to Washington. That of Ellsworth is printed directly from the original negative made by M. B. Brady, probably during the time when the Fire Zouaves were being organized.

F. H. M.

New York, February 15, 1916.

The Letter.

Washington D.C.
May 25. 1861

To the Father and Mother of Col.
Elmer E. Ellsworth:

My dear Sir and Madam,

In this sentence,
loss of your noble son, our affliction
here, is scarcely less than your own.
So much of promised usefulness
to one's country, and of bright hopes
for one's self and friends, have rare-
ly been so suddenly darken, as
in his fall. In size, in years, and
in youthful appearance, a boy
only, his power to command men,
was surprisingly great. This power
combined with a firm intellect, an
indomitable energy, and a taste al-
together military, constituted in him,
as seemed to me, the best natural
talent, in that department, I ever knew.

And yet he was singularly modest and deferential in social intercourse— My acquaintance with him began less than two years ago; yet through the latter half of the intervening period, it was as intimate as the disparity of our ages, and my engrossing engagements, would permit— To me, he appeared to have no indulgences or pastimes; and I never heard him utter a profane, or an intemperate word— What was conclusive of his good heart, he never forgot his parents— The honors he labored for so laudably, and, in the end, so gallantly gave his life, he meant for them, no less than for himself—

In the hope that it may be no intrusion upon the sacredness of your sorrow, I have ventured

to address you this tribute to the memory of my young friend, and your brave and early fallen child.

May God give you that consolation which is beyond all earthly power.

Sincerely your friend in a common affliction—

A. Lincoln

E. ELMER ELLSWORTH

Col. 11th N. Y. Infantry

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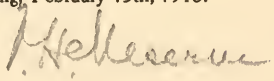

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